

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands

Testimony

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am here on behalf of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) to express the organization's strong support for H.R. 1509, which, as you know, would authorize the Disabled Veterans' LIFE Memorial Foundation to establish a memorial on Federal land in the District of Columbia or its environs to honor America's disabled veterans.

The DAV is an organization dedicated solely to building better lives for America's disabled veterans. Our more than one million members, who are themselves service-connected disabled veterans, are drawn and held together by the bonds that come from their common experience of service in the Nation's Armed Forces and their mutual understanding of the personal sacrifices and suffering associated with that service.

Ours is a Nation of patriotic citizens that shares its pride and bears together its obligations and its pain. Although most of our citizens are not themselves called to serve, as family members, friends, and members of the community, they serve in spirit with their veterans and have a shared sense of the price of freedom and the personal costs of war. At the same time, they recognize the extraordinary burdens imposed upon these few for the well-being and security of all. Our citizens therefore have a deep appreciation for the special sacrifices of veterans, especially those who are disabled during service. For that reason and because veterans represent the very best of our patriotic ideals and love of country, we hold them in the highest esteem and we reserve special honors for them as expressions of our reverence.

All who serve their Nation deserve special recognition, but those who are disabled as a consequence of their service are unquestionably among the most deserving. Not only did they pay a higher cost for our freedoms during service, when their military battles come to an end, their personal battles in life as disabled veterans only begin. They continue to pay the price of our freedom for the rest of their lives.

Disabled veterans are yesterday's soldiers, today's citizens. As yesterday's soldiers, their character was revealed in the choices they made. They were committed to our cause; they cared; they answered the call; they faced uncertainties, hardship, and danger. They took upon themselves one of the greatest of burdens. They risked their own well-being, lives, and health for the sake of others and our cause. They endured. They served faithfully. They exhibited valor and fortitude. They shed their blood in defense of our Nation and democratic ideals. They secured the promises of liberty. They best exemplified what General Douglas MacArthur meant by "duty, honor, country."

As yesterday's soldiers and today's citizens, they stand as an example for all of us. For their countrymen, they showed courage, they achieved victory, and they gave their health: Their noble deeds, their achievements, and their sacrifices for this country and future generations deserve recognition. We have fittingly recognized the contributions of several special groups of veterans by erecting memorials in Washington; yet, we have none honoring America's disabled veterans. As today's citizens, they should receive recognition for what they did as yesterday's soldiers.

President Lyndon Johnson said: "America holds some of its greatest honors for the men who have stood in its defense, and kept alive its freedoms." President John F. Kennedy said: "This country does not forget God or the soldier. Upon both we depend." With the memorials situated in and around the Mall, we tell the story of America. These memorials signify what we stand for. They represent our heart, our character, and our soul as a Nation. Inherent in that heart, character, and soul are both the virtue of self-sacrifice and the corresponding deepest respect, admiration, and appreciation we maintain for those who have stood in our Nation's defense and paid the high price of freedom. In comparison to the price disabled veterans have paid, a memorial is a small price for the Nation to pay in return, and surely disabled veterans are one of the more deserving groups. It would be unthinkable that they to whom we owe our democracy would not be found deserving of a place in an area reserved for the celebration of that democracy.

Moreover, a memorial to disabled veterans will serve many beneficial purposes for those it honors and for the Nation as a whole. It will be an expression of the sincere human emotion and deep gratitude we feel in remembrance of what disabled veterans gave-what they continue to give-and what they secured for our people. For posterity, it will chronicle, stand as a testimonial, venerate, and pay homage to the bravery of veterans who were disabled as a result of their noble service to our country. It will make a statement that we respect above all else the willingness of Americans to stand up for what is right even when it is at great personal cost. It will instill in us a sense of the responsibility we have to take all necessary measures to protect what disabled veterans won with their blood. It will demonstrate the value we place on our freedoms, what it means to serve one's country, and what kind of a country we want in the future. It will embody the spirit of selfless service and stand as a symbol of our national determination, devotion, strength, and faith in our cause, our values, our people, and our future. Thus, it will communicate the greater meaning and greatness of what it is and what it takes to be an American.

These are the reasons that this memorial should be located on the Mall in Washington. These are the reasons that we support and are joining with the Disabled Veterans' LIFE Memorial Foundation in its efforts to construct this memorial here in our Nation's capital. These are the reasons we urge this Subcommittee to support H.R. 1509.

I want to thank the Subcommittee for allowing me to present the DAV's views on this matter.

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